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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRISTINA 000444

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SUBJECT: KOSOVO: FIVE TRAFFICKING SUSPECTS RECEIVE A TOTAL
OF 19 YEARS IN PRISON

REF: PRISTINA 150

Classified By: COM TINA KAIDANOW FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Kosovo media reported on May 29 that the Pristina Regional Court sentenced five people accused of trafficking in persons (TIP) to a total of 19 years in prison, ranging from 7.6 years for the group's ringleader to 2 years for a Moldovan woman whom the Kosovo Police Service (KPS) told us may have originally been a victim herself. The arrests, which occurred in June 2006, were the result of a two-year undercover operation that the KPS Trafficking in Human Beings Section (THBS) began while under the tutelage of UNMIK Police. The good news is that these sentences reflected the solid work of the KPS, which conducted the initial raid, and an increasing awareness by the Kosovo judiciary of the gravity of TIP crimes. On the other hand, the arrest of a female trafficker may confirm the KPS THBS's suspicion (reftel) that traffickers are starting to involve former victims in their crimes, making it potentially more easy to recruit victims. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) Kosovo media reported on May 29 that Pristina Regional Court sentenced five people accused of trafficking in persons (TIP) at the Tango Cafe in Pristina to a total of 19 years in prison. According to presiding judge Marie Ademi, the group's ringleader, Tango Cafe owner Hilmi Krasniqi, received 7.5 years in prison and a 5,000 euro fine, and a Moldovan woman, Natalia "Natasha" Antohi, received two years in prison. Although Antohi denies the charge, KPS THBS Chief Ramadan Ahmeti told USOP that KPS THBS believes she was initially a trafficking victim. The indictment says she worked in the Tango Cafe at three different times. Ahmet Llapashtica, Blerim Ibrahimi and Ruzhdi Berisha received 4.5, three and two years, respectively. Ademi told USOP she ordered detention on remand for Krasniqi, Llapashtica and Antohi until the judgment becomes final.

13. (C) The Tango Cafe ring allegedly engaged in human trafficking between February 2003 when the Tango Cafe opened and June 6, 2006 when the KPS raided the premises. The indictment says they recruited, transferred, housed and exploited women from Ukraine and Moldova. Krasniqi

reportedly promised the victims work as waitresses and dancers and provided them with plane tickets and employment contracts, but later forced them into prostitution. Llapshatica, Ibrahim and Berisha allegedly assisted Krasniqi with the recruitment, transfer and exploitation of the victims, while Antohi met them at the Pristina Airport, instructed them on how to behave with their clients, and supervised their work. According to KPS THBS Chief Ahmeti, the women lived and worked in the Tango Cafe, and were occasionally escorted to nearby hotels to serve clients. One of the victims who testified against the ring, Olesea Sirbu, said she was asked to sign an employment contract in English, which Antohi translated for her. She thought it was for a job as a dancer, but when she got to the Tango Cafe, she was forced to have sexual relations with clients. When she asked to go back to Moldova, Llapastica reportedly told her she would have to work for one year first.

14. (C) Ahmeti told USOP the bust was the result of a two-year undercover operation that was undertaken thanks to both routine investigative work and information from trafficking victims rescued in other raids who mentioned having worked at the Tango Cafe. The KPS THBS began the operation while still under UNMIK's supervision, but carried out the bust on their own shortly after transitioning. It was one of their first big post-transition operations.

15. (C) Comment: The Tango Cafe sentences reveal both the solid work of the KPS and a growing awareness among the Kosovo judiciary of the gravity of TIP crimes. In 2006, the majority of the TIP-related sentences handed down were for one year or less. Nevertheless, the arrest of Natasha Antohi may confirm the KPS THBS's suspicion that traffickers are

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starting to involve former victims in their business. This is a troubling trend since women may be more likely to trust employment offers from other women. USOP will continue to monitor TIP trends in Kosovo and to support TIP-related training for the Kosovo judiciary. USOP will also continue to push for the Kosovo Special Prosecutors Office (KSPO) to handle trafficking cases.

KAIDANOW